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Plastic dinosaurs and toy spaceships. Look, I can make the dinosaurs ride on the ships! They steer and work the guns; they engage in high-air dog fights. Well. Lizard fights I guess.

Or, more reasonably, the spaceships stay airborne while the 'saurs roam below. The aliens zig and zag - space cowboys, driving their herd. It takes a while, but eventually the dinosaurs are rounded up, corralled in an invisible force-field pen. Now. Where's the bronk-buster? The one misfit, anti-hero alien who can ride and tame the mighty T-Rex?

Oh what the fuck. All this is money I don't have spent on toys I can't afford. And another wasted day.

The bottle of wine standing at my elbow might have something to do with it.

What, do you think is waiting for me at the bottom of the bottle? A note, perhaps. A map. A cryptogram that would stymie the world's only consulting detective? The empty bottle itself might be the MacGuffin. The glass has been irradiated by a Russian crime-lord; or the wine was experimental embalming fluid being tested on an unsuspecting group of cheap-ass alcoholics (the bottle cost \$2.99 (seriously)) to prevent the zombie apocalypse.

No. Fuck zombies.

Rub the bottle. Is that a genie wafting from the quarter-sized opening? Or a diseased vapor?

Either way; this doesn't end well. Goddamnit, shouldn't there be something meaningful at the climax? The bright light of humanity shining through? The audience comes away rattled, but hopeful?

Sergeant Major Whitney Nelsson worked hard to get my attention; flailing her arms like a signalman, doing her best to jump up and down though the height limits of our cages meant it was little more than raising up on her toes. I saw the commotion through half-opened eyes and grunted. She spoke in a whisper; "We have to try again."

I rolled over and ignored her.

Everyone was dead. My platoon, the army; hell, for all I knew, the entire human race had been eradicated.

I could care less. I just wanted to lay still until it was my time. I had tried praying it would be soon - and quick - but apparently God was dead too. Nothing for it but to wait. And wait.

A slight puff of air irritated the back of my head. I swatted at the space with a limp hand, but the wind continued. I rolled over to see Sergeant Nelsson laying on her stomach, cheeks puffed out blowing on a plastic straw poked through the bars between our cages.

She took the straw away from her mouth and hissed, "Virgil! Goddamnit."

Where had the straw come from?

"Virgil!" she continued. "We have to try again!"

I shut my eyes and rolled away, all the way away, to the other side of my cage. It wasn't far enough. I heard Nelsson sob.

Fuck her.

It wasn't food; they never fed us, but the aliens came with their tentacles and needles and tubes and lashed us to the bars of the cages and proceeded to poke and inject. Great. I wouldn't die of starvation today.

The tentacles retracted, and we fell to the ground. Sergeant Nelsson's face swam before mine. "Court-martial," she said. "I'll court-martial you."

I tried to laugh but couldn't. I tried to move my head so I wouldn't see her.

That I could do.

The next time they came, Sergeant Nelsson made a damned fine ruckus of the affair, wailing and flailing around like a madwoman. I lazily watched the ridiculousness from the cell next door. *Shut it*, I mentally commanded her. *Shut it and die*.

During the chaotic swirling of alien tentacles and human limbs, from out of nowhere, a straight razor appeared in Nelsson's hand. With a Viking yell, she sliced open her own wrist and sprayed the blood at the pulsating mass of bruised-purple terror outside the cage. Then in a flash the blade found her own throat, a ferocious swipe, and she flung herself against the bars. The creature was doused.

And then, under all the human blood, it caught fire. Flash fire. Each tentacle set aglow with blaze. And everywhere the flaming octopus limbs touched - more fire.

The walls, the floor. The roof. And the bars of my own cage.

Melted away in a bright burst of light.

I staggered forward. Fire licked at me, but I hardly noticed. All around, alien globular masses moved in a frantic panic. Just a spark seemed to set them totally ablaze. The walls became lava; it pooled on the floors. My feet burned, but so what?

Soon I stood before my jet. My own spaceship. A skunk-works X series. So new she had been designed to fit my body. The seat had been contoured to my own ass.

I'd lost a lot of weight since being captured, but she would still hold me.

Escape. Victory. Are they the same?